

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3106
INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY OSLO
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USMISSION USNATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 HELSINKI 2737

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, MPOL, NATO, UR, FI
SUBJECT: MORE ON SOVIET DEFENSE MINISTER USTINOV'S PROPOSAL FOR
JOINT SOVIET/FINNISH MILITARY MANEUVERS

REF: (A) HELSINKI 2406, (B) HELSINKI 2361, (C) MOSCOW 18059,

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY EFFORTS TO DEVELOP ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
ON THE USTINOV PROPOSAL HAVE BEEN HAMPERED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S
POLICY OF DENYING THAT ANY SUCH PROPOSAL WAS MADE. DESPITE
GOVERNMENT DISCLAIMERS, WE HAVE RECEIVED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
FROM WELL-PLACED PRIVATE SOURCES IN EFFECT CONFIRMING THE
PROPOSAL AND THE FIRM FINNISH REJECTION. SPECULATION ON
SOVIET MOTIVATIONS INCLUDES A RANGE OF POSSIBLE CONSIDERATIONS
RUNNING FROM THE SPECIFICALLY FINNISH TO REGIONAL AND GLOBAL.
IT APPEARS TO US THAT THE MOST SERIOUS IMPLICATION OF THE
PROPOSAL FOR THE FINNS IS THAT IT UNDERSCORES SOVIET
INSENSITIVITY TO FINLAND'S ASPIRATIONS FOR NEUTRALITY. THIS
FACTOR MAY BE THE PRINCIPAL REASON WHY THE
GOVERNMENT HOPES TO KEEP THE PROPOSAL FROM BECOMING
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WIDELY KNOWN. END SUMMARY.

2. THE EMBASSY HAS BEEN ATTEMPTING TO DEVELOP
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONCERNING THE PROPOSAL BY
SOVIET DEFENSE MINISTER USTINOV DURING HIS RECENT
VISIT FOR JOINT SOVIET/FINNISH MILITARY MANEUVERS
(REFTEL A). OUR TASK HAS BEEN MADE MORE DIFFICULT

BY THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS ADOPTED A POLICY OF FLATLY DENYING THAT USTINOV MADE ANY SUCH PROPOSAL. THE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED SOME INDICATIONS THE GOVERNMENT IS CONCERNED THAT NEWS OF THE USTINOV PROPOSAL HAD REACHED WESTERN DIPLOMATIC CIRCLES AND HAS ATTEMPTED TO SQUELCH SUCH INFORMATION BY NOT COMMENTING ON IT PUBLICLY AND BY ASSERTING PRIVATELY THAT IT IS UNFOUNDED GOSSIP. TWO RANKING MFA OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR THAT NO SUCH PROPOSAL WAS MADE. THEY SUPPORTED THEIR ASSERTIONS BY ARGUING THE SOVIETS WOULD NEVER MAKE SUCH A PROPOSAL, BECAUSE IT WOULD CLEARLY UNDERMINE FINNISH NEUTRALITY WHICH WOULD BE AGAINST THE SOVIETS' OWN INTEREST.

3. DESPITE DISCLAIMERS FROM FINNISH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT USTINOV DID IN FACT MAKE THE PROPOSAL. IN ADDITION TO THE RELIABLE-SOURCE INFORMATION REPORTED IN REFERENCE A AND IN OTHER MESSAGES, THE EMBASSY HAS IN RECENT DAYS RECEIVED ADDITIONAL CONFIRMATION SEPARATELY FROM TWO IMPORTANT PRIVATE SECTOR FINNS CLOSE TO THE GOVERNMENT DEFENSE AND FOREIGN POLICY COMMUNITY. BOTH STATED THEY HAVE INFORMATION THAT USTINOV PROPOSED JOINT MILITARY MANEUVERS DURING HIS VISIT. EACH STATED THAT HIS INFORMATION CONFIRMS THAT PRESIDENT KEKKONEN FIRMLY REJECTED THE SOVIET PROPOSAL.

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4. WITH RESPECT TO POSSIBLE SOVIET MOTIVATIONS IN PUTTING FORTH SUCH A PROPOSAL AT THIS TIME, THE FIRST OF THESE TWO SOURCES SAID, ALMOST WISTFULLY, IT WOULD BE NICE TO ASSUME THAT USTINOV--BEING A MILITARY MAN--DID NOT REALIZE THE POLITICAL COMPLICATIONS OF WHAT HE HAD PROPOSED AND HAD NOT CLEARED HIS PROPOSAL AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL OF THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT. THE SOURCE WENT ON NEVERTHELESS TO CATEGORIZE THIS HYPOTHESIS AS A HIGHLY UNLIKELY ONE, HOWEVER ATTRACTIVE, BECAUSE USTINOV IS FULLY FAMILIAR WITH THE FINNISH SITUATION AND, MOREOVER, ALSO WEARS A POLITICAL HAT AS A MEMBER OF THE CPSU POLITBURO. THE SAME SOURCE REFERRED TO WHAT HE CHARACTERIZED AS TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT IN THE SOVIET UNION ABOUT FINLAND, ONE SUPPORTIVE OF FINNISH NEUTRALITY AND THE OTHER HOSTILE TO THE CONCEPT. HE SPECULATED THAT THE USTINOV PROPOSAL WAS THE WORK OF PROPONENTS OF THE LATTER SCHOOL. HE SAID THE HARDLINE POSITION ON FINLAND IS USUALLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE CPSU, BECAUSE OF ITS IDEOLOGICAL APPROACH, WHEREAS THE SOVIET MILITARY HAS USUALLY TENDED TO BE MORE PRAGMATIC AND WILLING

TO SEE THE FINNISH POINT OF VIEW. THUS, ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE, IT IS SOMEWHAT SURPRISING THAT USTINOV WOULD MAKE THIS PROPOSAL. THE SOURCE WENT ON TO SPECULATE THAT SOVIET MOTIVATION MAY BE ENTIRELY UNRELATED TO THE SPECIFIC FINNISH CONTEXT BUT RATHER MIGHT CONSTITUTE A SOVIET REACTION TO THE GENERAL RISING LEVEL OF TENSION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST OR MAY REFLECT THE EFFECT ON SOVIET POLICY OF THE IMPENDING CHANGE IN SOVIET LEADERSHIP.

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5. THE SECOND SOURCE ALSO TENDED TO EXPLAIN THE SOVIET PROPOSAL IN TERMS OF RISING SOVIET CONCERN OVER EAST/WEST RELATIONS. THIS SOURCE, HOWEVER, WAS INCLINED TO PLACE MUCH OF THE BLAME FOR THE PROPOSAL ON SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO FINLAND V.S. STEPANOV WHOM HE BELIEVES HAS BEEN RECOMMENDING TO MOSCOW A FIRMER SOVIET POLICY TOWARD FINLAND. WHATEVER THE SOVIET MOTIVATION, BOTH SOURCES EXPRESSED THE BELIEF THAT THE USTINOV PROPOSAL WAS A VERY TROUBLING SOVIET STEP WHICH THE FINNS ARE TAKING SERIOUSLY. BOTH EXPRESSED SATISFACTION THAT KEKKONEN BY HIS FIRM REJECTION OF THE PROPOSAL HAD EFFECTIVELY DEFENDED FINNISH INTERESTS. BOTH ALSO SAID THAT THE THINLY VEILED MESSAGES CONTAINED IN THE HELSINGIN SANOMAT AND HUFVUDSTADSBLADET EDITORIALS (REFERENCE B) WOULD BE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD IN MOSCOW.

6. NEITHER SOURCE WAS SURPRISED BY THE EFFORTS OF THE FINNISH GOVERNMENT TO HOLD VERY CLOSELY INFORMATION CONCERNING THE USTINOV PROPOSAL AND TO DENY IN FACT CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT IT HAD BEEN MADE. THE SOURCES SAID THAT IT WOULD NOT SERVE FINNISH INTERESTS FOR THIS INFORMATION TO BECOME WIDELY KNOWN, PARTICULARLY IF IT WERE TO REACH THE WESTERN PRESS. ONE SOURCE IMPLIED THAT IT MIGHT BE AN EMBARRASSMENT TO USTINOV IF IT BECAME KNOWN THAT HE HAD MADE A PROPOSAL WHICH THE FINNS HAD SO FIRMLY REJECTED. HE LIKENED THE GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH TO THIS MATTER TO AN INCIDENT IN 1972 WHEN PRESIDENT KEKKONEN HAD INTERVENED WITH SOVIET AUTHORITIES TO HAVE THEM REMOVE THE THEN SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO FINLAND, ALEKSEY BELYAKOV, WHOM KEKKONEN BELIEVED WAS INTERVENING TOO ACTIVELY IN FINNISH DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. THE SOURCE CLAIMED THAT BY HANDLING THE BELYAKOV QUESTION QUIETLY THE FINNS WERE ABLE TO ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVE OF HIS REMOVAL WITHOUT ANY PUBLIC CHALLENGE TO THE SOVIETS.

7. COMMENT. THE FACT THAT MFA OFFICIALS ARE UNWILLING TO ADMIT TO US THAT USTINOV MADE HIS PROPOSAL FOR JOINT MILITARY MANEUVERS CLOSES OFF AT THIS TIME ANY POSSIBILITY OF EXPLORING WITH THEM QUESTIONS ABOUT POSSIBLE SOVIET MOTIVATION OR ABOUT IMPLICATIONS FOR SOVIET/FINNISH RELATIONS. WE ARE INCLINED AT THIS POINT TO THE VIEW (REFERENCE C) THAT THE USTINOV PROPOSAL IS PERHAPS BEST EXPLAINED IN TERMS OF SOVIET OBJECTIVES AND CONCERNS IN THE NORDIC AREA. IT MAY WELL ALSO BE RELATED, AS SOME FINNS APPEAR TO SUGGEST, TO SOVIET ANXIETIES GENERALLY CONCERNING THE EVOLUTION OF EAST/WEST RELATIONS AND THE CHINA CHALLENGE.

8. AS FAR AS THE SPECIFIC IMPLICATIONS FOR FINLAND, THE MOST DISTURBING ASPECT FOR THE FINNS MUST SURELY CONFIDENTIAL

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BE THAT THE PROPOSAL UNDERSCORES SOVIET INSENSITIVITY TO FINNISH ASPIRATIONS FOR A CREDIBLE NEUTRALITY. PRESIDENT KEKKONEN HAS IN THE PAST TERMED FINNISH NEUTRALITY AS HIS LIFE'S MAIN WORK, AND IT MUST BE VERY DISTURBING TO FINNISH FOREIGN-POLICY MAKERS THAT

THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WOULD BE WILLING TO UNDERMINE
FINLAND'S ALREADY SOMEWHAT EMBATTLED NEUTRAL IMAGE
BY PROPOSING JOINT MILITARY MANEUVERS. THIS IMPLICA-
TION OF THE USTINOV PROPOSAL MORE THAN ANY OTHER ASPECT
MAY EXPLAIN THE FINNISH GOVERNMENT'S EFFORT TO KEEP
THE PROPOSAL FROM BECOMING WIDELY KNOWN. IN THIS
REGARD IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT THE STALINIST-LINE
FINNISH NEWSPAPER TIEDONANTAJA AGAIN RAISED THE
DESIRABILITY OF JOINT FINNISH/SOVIET MILITARY
MANEUVERS IN AN EDITORIAL AUGUST 22, STILL WITHOUT
MENTIONING THE USTINOV PROPOSAL. SINCE IT IS
UNLIKELY THAT TIEDONANTAJA WOULD RETURN TO THIS
SENSITIVE SUBJECT WITHOUT GUIDANCE, THE NEWSPAPER'S
LATEST EDITORIAL MAY INDICATE THE SOVIET DO
NOT INTEND TO LET THE CONCEPT OF JOINT MANEUVERS DIE
REGARDLESS OF THE FINNISH GOVERNMENT'S REJECTION OF
THE USTINOV PROPOSAL AND CONCERN THAT THE ISSUE NOT
BECOME PUBLIC.
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